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The State Library---Its Character and Aims

By W. E. HENRY, State Librarian

THE history of the State Library at its beginning and for many years after is a rather sorry story of a perfunctory institution that existed, not in response to a real demand, but because the legislature had said it should. It was established in 1825 as a department of the office of Secretary of State, for the purpose of furnishing information for the officers of the State when at the capital—or, as the law read: for “the members of the Legislature, the secretaries and clerks of each House thereof, the officers of the several branches of the executive department of the State government, the judge of the United States District Court, the United States District Attorney, the judges of the Supreme Court of this State, and the judges of the Circuit Courts when they or any of them may be at the seat of government.” Subsequent statutes gradually broadened the scope of the library and extended its privileges. In 1841 it became a separate institution and was removed from the Secretary’s office.

The State Library was for many years a political office. It was understood to belong to the party in power, and the party majority in the legislature always elected to the office of librarian a man of the right political faith. It was at once a reward for party service and an earnest of party support. Men who are put into office for these reasons are not put in for special fitness, and whatever fitness there might be is largely accidental. The party-chosen State librarians were, presumably, not an exception to this rule; and the qualifications they possessed stood small show of useful development, what with uncertain tenure of office and miserly allowance of funds.

The latter handicap of itself would have effectually prevented the usefulness of the library however capable the librarians, and as a matter of fact the library had practically no growth for the first fifty years of its existence. At the end of that time the collective wisdom had got so far away from the idea of the library as a political adjunct as to elect women to the office, and it should be noted that these, so far as can be judged from the evidence at hand, seem to have been the first incumbents to have the welfare and future of the library at heart. Sarah A. Oren (1873-5), appealed for a larger

appropriation and affirmed that "the great State of Indiana calls loudly for a well-filled reference library." Maggie F. Peelle (1879-'81) did a good work by starting the collection of books by Indiana writers, and it was by her advice that the library of the late Daniel Hough was purchased; and equal credit must be given to others.

In 1889 Mr. J. P. Dunn became librarian and, through some seemingly miraculous influence, succeeded in securing a most liberal appropriation. After two years, however, this fund was reduced and remained wholly inadequate until two years ago, when the people of the State and the legislature began to see the desirability of more liberal treatment. In consequence, the library now has a much better outlook than at any time in its past.

Creating of Non-partisan Library Management In 1895 a law was enacted removing the library from partisan politics, and its management was placed in the hands of a non-partisan board—the State Board of Education. It was not to be managed as part of the school system, but was so placed because this board was thought to be as clear of partisan bias as any body of persons in the State, and at the same time it possessed a special degree of fitness because the majority of its members were men of the highest educational qualification. This board represents all parts of the State, and no person on it secures his place by virtue of political or religious affiliations. It is a board the membership of which can not change rapidly, and which, through political powers, cannot reward friends or punish enemies. The policy of this non-partisan and ex officio board has been from the first, and is, that no person shall enter the service of the library who has not special qualifications for the work.

Size and Scope of Library The State Library has now a collection of nearly forty thousand volumes consisting largely of historical material. This is composed of sources rather than secondary matter, being made up chiefly of State government publications, the publications of the United States government, and a very considerable collection of local records in the way of town, county and State histories, the printed archives from various States, and the histories of particular movements, institutions, sects and specific organizations working toward some specific ends. It should be added that the files of Indiana newspapers, particularly of the earlier years, are, I believe, fuller and more valuable than exists elsewhere.

**State and U. S.
Publications,
how Acquired**

State and United States publications are received by deposit and exchange, demanding no expenditure of money, so that all our purchases are in the lines of history, economics and sociology, and, as before said, mostly in source material. The library especially seeks those publications which are either too bulky or too expensive to be owned and preserved by private or small public libraries. This makes it largely a reference library for historical purposes; yet it is now rapidly becoming more than is implied in "reference" or "historical."

**Method of Cir-
culating Books**

By the provisions of a law enacted by the last legislature the State Library can now lend any but rare books to any responsible citizen of the State if the borrower is willing to pay transportation charges. By this plan it is enabled to supplement the local library and to reach a considerable number who do not have access to any local library. I hope to see the time when the State at public expense may place the book, not merely in the post or express office, but in the hands of the reader. Any argument that will justify the State in buying the book for the reader will equally justify delivering that book to him, whether he be far or near.

**Special Indiana
Collection**

The State Library makes every possible effort to secure all printed material that shall in any way throw light upon the history or present condition of Indiana. We purchase, so far as possible, every book or pamphlet ever written by an Indiana author, upon any subject; or by any author, of any time or place, upon any subject relating to the State's life.

Further Aims

When we have more funds I hope to see this institution become a general reference library in all departments of science and literature, so that almost any rational demand of the citizens of the State, within these lines, may be supplied; and I hope to see the State ready to bear all expense to put the book into the hand of the reader in whatever part of the State he may be. A larger fund, however, is necessary to these conditions, and in the securing of such fund all citizens can have a voice. To every citizen a great and really useful institution of this character should be a matter of interest and pride. By such interest and pride you can materially help the library to grow and branch out into new fields of usefulness. We bespeak your co-operation.